

Luke 19:1-10
Hearing the Call - ZACCHAEUS
November 13, 2022
Rev'd Chris Johnson

Can you tell me what these people have in common? [Aust Treasurers]
They are all tax collectors. They've all been Treasurers of Australia.

Politicians are not usually the most popular people in the world and Treasurers in particular are not especially liked. They have to keep the budget in balance for the overall good of the economy when there are endless demands being made up on it, and it is their job to keep saying no. It's not an easy job. Not a particularly popular job.

Zacchaeus was a Tax Collector. Tax collecting in 1st century Palestine was of course very different to 21st century Australia, however, nobody likes tax collectors in any society. In first century Palestine Jewish tax collectors were especially despised, for two reasons.

1. They collected taxes for the Roman occupying power. So this was the enemy who had invaded their country and taken over. Jews who collected tax for them were seen as terrible collaborators.
2. They were able to set their own fee however they wished, with the backing of the brute force of Rome. They tended to be wealthy.

So in other words they were traitors and they were greedy.

There are two other pieces of information in these opening verses which also point to how greedy and wealthy Zacchaeus must have been.

Zacchaeus is described in Verse 2 as a Chief Tax Collector. Which probably means he wasn't just sitting at a tollbooth collecting copper coins from travellers. He was probably dealing with the top end of town where the percentages given in tax would have been much more lucrative.

Next we note this incident took place in Jericho. Jericho was a town near Jerusalem on the trading route to the east. It was a very wealthy town. Being a chief tax collector in a place like Jericho would make any greedy person's eyes light up. You could say Zacchaeus had made it. He had obviously worked his way up the system and was now very powerful and very wealthy.
So who needs to be popular!

From a rational human point of view the chances of Zacchaeus being converted would seem very remote. Powerful wealthy people don't easily admit that they need God to save them. Those early disciples must have thought the last person who would join them would be Zacchaeus. It may have been in the same way that we think of the possibility of Phillip Adams or Richard Dawkins being converted today.

Yet despite his power and wealth Zacchaeus sought after Jesus!
Zacchaeus was inquisitive. He was open to explore something new, and sometimes that is all it takes.

Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree. What a very undignified thing to do for a chief tax collector! But he was short, he couldn't see over the crowd. You might say, 'So why doesn't he just get in the front row?' People would have coped with that if they could still see over his head. But remember the crowd hated him; he was a traitor and a thief.

He didn't want to mix with the crowd. In a tree he was above the crowd. Zacchaeus was used to people looking down on him, in the tree he was looking down on them.

And you can hide in a tree.

But Jesus doesn't allow him to hide. Jesus spots him in the tree, goes over to him and addresses him. Not only does Jesus talk to him but he also invites himself around to dinner. *"I must stay at your house today."* he says. He doesn't say *'May I stay at your place'* it is *"I must stay"*; this is in the imperative. This is Jesus going about his divine mission as he says in v10, *"to seek and to save the lost"*. Jesus has a commanding presence. His words are arresting, maybe just a little overwhelming.

Zacchaeus accepts Jesus' request gladly. V6 says he hurried down from the tree at once and welcomed him 'gladly'. The Greek word here is translated elsewhere as rejoice. It is with joy that Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus to his home.

Sadly the crowd don't share Zacchaeus' joy and enthusiasm. We're told they grumbled and said, *"He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."*v7

In our language, *"Jesus how can you mix with this mongrel."* These are people who would have been scraping around to feed their families and put clothes on their back, while Zacchaeus' clothes were becoming finer and his food richer. To boot, he was probably importing lavish decorations for his house from around the Roman Empire.

Everyone knew it was their money that was funding his extravagance. No wonder they grumbled.

Unfortunately we don't get any details on what happened inside the house. Where we do get some detail, is the change in Zacchaeus having met Jesus.

v8 -Half of his goods he will give to the poor
 -Anyone he has defrauded and he will payback four times as much.

This is what the Bible calls REPENTANCE. It is a sign of salvation.

It is an indication that a person has really understood who Jesus is, wants to embrace Jesus and follow him.

Zacchaeus thought that his wealth and power could save him. He now realises how ridiculous such a proposition is, so is prepared to renounce those things and turn to the only one who can truly save him.

And Jesus does. He says, *"Today salvation has come to this house."*

What an interesting way to put it. Jesus isn't thinking about salvation in the future tense here. Rather he says, *"Today, salvation has come to this house."*

What does salvation look like? In some of Jesus teaching it is in the future tense, about getting from hell into heaven. But salvation is also about this life. It's about a repentance in this life that leads to a 'salvation lifestyle'. Jesus never talks about salvation as a ticket to heaven and then you can just go on living the way you were before you believed. Salvation is about having a radical new outlook on the world here and now.

In this passage it's described in terms of being lost and found. Look at v10, *"For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Back in chapter 15 of Luke Jesus tells the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. But that which is lost is not always obvious. The younger son is obviously lost in a prodigal lifestyle, but the point of the parable is the older son who also was lost. Zacchaeus wasn't obviously living a degrading lifestyle. He had a stellar career, earning heaps of money, with plenty of power and influence. To all outward appearances he was found; But Jesus saw him as lost and sought him out. Jesus touched his heart and that which was lost was found.

If you look at those three lost and found parables you'll see the chief characteristic when the item or the person is found is joy.

- The shepherd rejoices when he finds his lost sheep.
 - The woman rejoices when she finds her lost coin.
 - The Father throws his arms around his lost son and kisses him. That sounds like joy.
 - Zacchaeus is a little different. He isn't the one searching he is the one found. But being found brings great joy as well. In v6 it says he welcomed Jesus with rejoicing.
-
- I'm sure there was also great rejoicing in heaven when he repented, as it says in Luke 15.
 - I imagine there was great joy in his household when he repented and became a much kinder husband and father.
 - And there would have been joy in the streets. Although the people grumbled when Jesus went into his house, I suspect in the weeks following there was joy amongst the people Zacchaeus had cheated. Fancy receiving four times what they had been cheated, what a bonus. And now charged only the correct amount of tax and treated with respect. That should have put a smile on their faces.
 - And imagine the distribution of half of his wealth to the poor, what a social transformation.

Salvation is about changed behaviour now, that brings blessing now.

I have read reports that when there was spiritual revival in Australia during the 1959 Billy Graham crusades, a time when many people came to repentance and faith, the crime rate dipped in the next few years. There was genuine repentance. True saving faith changes behaviour, it includes repentance.

Think of it in terms of joy. Previously Zacchaeus thought that power and money would bring him joy. He now realises how hollow that is so he turns to Jesus to find his joy.

Such extravagant salvation produces such great joy that it gives him the ability to let go of this money and share it around with extravagant generosity.

My friends this is the heart of repentance. Some people think repentance is just about being sorry for the bad things we do and trying to do better. It is at least this but that is not the heart of the matter. The heart of Biblical repentance is realising that you can't save yourself whether it be through your power or money or talents or great work ethic or good deeds. It is about renouncing all those things you think will save you and be your ultimate happiness and realising that it is only found in Jesus; and what is liberating is you can therefore sit loosely with all these other things.

Zacchaeus can give away such large percentages of his wealth because he has experienced this radical inner change of heart which means he now finds his chief joy in Jesus.

Why are some people reluctant to give in the extravagant way Zacchaeus did? Maybe they haven't experienced enough of the joy of the Gospel.

- Experienced the depth of God's forgiveness won so sacrificially at the cross.
- Experienced the intimacy of being adopted as sons and daughters of the living God.
- Experienced the power of the Holy Spirit taking us beyond our comfort zone in love for God and for others.

Do you want to know Gospel joy? Welcome Jesus as the very centre of your life.

Acknowledge Jesus as Lord, which means doing whatever he tells you to do.

This is the heart of repentance. And the heart of the message of Zacchaeus.

So my friends we come to the end of our series on Hearing the Call. The Call of Zacchaeus fits well with the call of God as we've been listening to it over the last seven weeks.

In Week 1 Jesus entered the home of a prominent Pharisee, a very respectable man in Jewish society and spoke into his heart. Here in Week 8 Jesus enters the home of a Tax Collector, a very unrespectable man in Jewish society and speaks into his heart. Jesus did not care about title or reputation, he sought out lost people at every level of society.

In Week 2 we heard the Parable of the Great Banquet where three people make excuses and turn down the invitation. Zacchaeus doesn't turn down Jesus' invitation. He is inquisitive. Salvation comes to his house.

In Week 3 Jesus talked about the cost of following him and the need to take up one's cross. Zacchaeus happily counts the cost and gives a great part of his fortune away.

In Week 4 the story of the Rich man and Lazarus. The rich man languishes in Hades while Lazarus is in the bosom of Abraham. Well Zacchaeus is a rich man who is able to fit through the eye of a needle, and enter the Kingdom. Did you notice in verse 9 Jesus declares Zacchaeus a son of Abraham. Here is a rich man who belongs to Abraham.

In Week 5 Jesus taught about the need to forgive whenever a brother or sister repents. When Jesus entered Zacchaeus' house the crowd were not ready to forgive but Jesus was. Of course once they saw the effects of repentance they might have found it a little easier. But we are called to forgive when we've been wronged.

In Week 6 Jesus healed 10 lepers. Zacchaeus was treated like a leper, an outcast, and Jesus healed the cause of his isolation. He changed his heart. And Zacchaeus' repentance is like the leper who came back to say thank you. True repentance always arises out of gratitude to Jesus.

In Week 7 in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Zacchaeus is indeed the tax collector who goes home justified. In Jesus visit to his house he has found the mercy of God and he has responded appropriately with repentance.

Are you hearing the call my friends? It is a call to repentance and faith in Jesus.

Zacchaeus heard the call of God and it turned his life upside down.

Jesus *"Today I must stay at your house."*

Becomes *"Today salvation has come to this house."*

Where Jesus is ... salvation abounds

The lost becomes found

and there is great rejoicing.

The message is simple - repent and believe.